

5. THE ASHY MINIVET [*PERICROCOTUS DIVARICATUS* (RAFFLES)]: AN ADDITION TO THE INDIAN AVIFAUNA

On 31 January 1965, while collecting birds at Funnel Hill about an hour's drive from Bombay, I came across a mixed party of warblers and flycatchers in a rather thick patch of forest. Among them was a pair of unfamiliar birds calling to each other. They looked more like one of the white wagtails. Their calls were quite unfamiliar, resembling the harsh voice of a shrike rather than the melodious and pleasant trilling call of minivets.

A specimen was secured and the first impression was that it might be one of the Pied Shrikes of the genus *Hemipus*. Later, in the evening along with Mr. Pereira of the Society, I saw two more pairs of the same birds just at the foot of Funnel Hill. On further examination of the specimen collected, I came to the conclusion that it was an Ashy Minivet, *Pericrocotus divaricatus*, an opinion which was confirmed by study of literature available at the Bombay Natural History Society. The species is not listed in Ripley's SYNOPSIS. The distribution given in the FAUNA is as follows:

'Breeding in Japan, Amur and most possibly Northern China, and in winter extending to South China, the Indo-Chinese Countries, Philippines, Sumatra, Borneo, Malay Peninsula, entering south Burma as a very rare straggler only.'

It is curious to note that in all the literature consulted the Ashy Minivet is considered to be not only a rare bird, even within its geographical range, but also the most outstanding and conspicuous species of the genus.

On both the two occasions when I saw the minivets, I noticed that they moved in pairs in patches of thick forest in the light foliage canopy of trees about 20 feet in height. The specimen collected was in moult but the condition of the flight feathers revealed that it had covered a very long flight.

The specimen has been deposited in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society and bears Register No. BNHS 22152.

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[As noted by Mr. Humayun Abdulali in his recent paper on 'The Birds of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands' (*Journal* 61: 557), *Pericrocotus cinereus* Lafr. [= *P. divaricatus* (Raffles)] was recorded by A. L. Butler (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 12: 394) in the Andamans. Butler's specimen, however, was not preserved being badly damaged and his record has been consistently ignored by later workers.—EDS.]